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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CAIRO 000015

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KISL](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [EG](#)
SUBJECT: ARRESTS OF MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD MEMBERS CONTINUE;
BROTHERHOOD REITERATES REJECTION OF VIOLENCE

REF: CAIRO 7171

Classified By: Ambassador Francis J. Ricciardone, for
reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The mid-December arrests of between 140-200 Muslim Brotherhood (MB) members (reftel) have been followed by further detentions of an estimated 58-67 MB members in recent days, coupled with the reported closure of some MB-owned businesses. In the wake of the December 10 Al-Azhar University student demonstration which sparked the recent rise in tensions (reftel), the MB's senior leadership has reiterated the organization's decades-old rejection of violence. Government-MB tensions are likely to further rise in the coming months as the debate over President Hosni Mubarak's proposed constitutional reforms heats up. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) On December 24, Egyptian police detained three businessmen (the owners, respectively, of pharmaceutical, construction, and import-export companies), and the heads of two Islamic publishing houses, all of whom are allegedly affiliated with the MB. The police also reportedly sealed the up-market furniture store "Istikbal" (owned by recently detained MB Second Deputy Supreme Guide Khairat el-Shatir). MB lawyer Abdul Moneim Abdul Magsoud told journalists that "large sums of money" were confiscated from all the businesses raided.

¶3. (SBU) Security forces also detained twenty-five alleged MB members on December 30 in the countryside towns of Sufiya (Sharqiya governorate) and Al Fayoum (Al Fayoum governorate), while on the same day, eight MB members were detained in Cairo for distributing Eid al Adha holiday leaflets on behalf of local MB parliamentarians Magdi Ashour and Mahmoud Amer Ali. On January 3, Egyptian newspapers reported that 20-29 MB members (among them university professors, doctors, and lawyers) were arrested January 2 in the Nile Delta governorates of Sharqiya, Gharbiya, and Daqahliya.

¶4. (SBU) The MB's leadership has loudly condemned the recent arrests, and attempted some damage control in response to the media outcry about the student demonstration which sparked the most recent wave of detentions. (Note: As reported reftel, the mid-December arrests came in the wake of a December 10 demonstration at the famed Al-Azhar University by 50 black-clad, mask-wearing students, demonstrating against the temporary expulsion of leaders of the Free Students Union, a "shadow" student government organization created after MB-affiliated students were prevented from participation in recent nationwide campus elections. End note). According to a January 2 report in independent daily Al Masry Al Yom, in recent meetings chaired by MB Supreme Guide Mohamed Mehdi Akef, the MB leadership decided to remove the head of the MB's Al-Azhar University office from his

position, and to embark on a series of "consultations" between the MB's top leadership, mid-level officials, and cadres, in an apparent effort to prevent the recurrence of any such allegedly unauthorized initiatives.

15. (SBU) In the wake of the December 10 Al-Azhar demonstration, the MB's senior leadership has pointedly reiterated the organization's decades-old rejection of violence. In a December 20 statement, Supreme Guide Akef noted, "We adopt a gradual, peaceful approach for reform which is based on Islam ... and we completely reject the use of violence and terrorism as a method to achieve political or any other targets." In response to an alleged recent Eid statement by Al Qaeda's Ayman al Zawahiri (in which Zawahiri reportedly referred to the recent detentions of MB members by stating, "I greet my brothers (on the occasion of the Eid al Adha) inside the prisons of Mubarak, the traitor"), Deputy Supreme Guide Mohamed Habib publicly commented, "The world has now come to realize the crystal clear difference between the MB's ideology and that of the Al Qaeda network to which Dr. Al Zawahiri belongs; we - the Muslim Brotherhood - reject completely the methods and actions by the Al Qaeda network and completely denounce violence and terrorism, and staunchly support peaceful change and reform." Influential MB Guidance Council member Dr. Abdel Monem Aboul Fotouh published a December 29 statement in an independent newspaper stating the MB's commitment to "the social, peaceful, national, and Da'wa method based on advice, reconciliation, partnership and cooperation among all Egyptians, including Muslims and Copts, leftists and liberals, rulers and ruled, where all of us will be held accountable in front of God, history and the coming generations with regard to the safety and dignity of this country." Aboul Fotouh also noted, "President Mubarak knows very well ... that the ideology of violence and military

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action are not adopted by the MB and are not a part of its methodology and thought."

16. (C) COMMENT: The apparent attempt to target MB financiers and businesses owned by MB members signals the seriousness with which the government is responding to recent stresses. The MB leadership's pronounced assurances of the organization's commitment to non-violence reflects the MB's continuing embarrassment over the December 10 Al-Azhar demonstration, and cognizance of the overwhelmingly negative public reaction. Government-MB tensions - characterized by vocal MB criticism of the government, demonstrations, and further arrests of MB members - are likely to rise in the coming months as the debate over President Mubarak's proposed constitutional reforms heats up, both inside Parliament and in the larger Egyptian political arena.

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